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ABSTRACT

Now that the enrollment increases of the 1960's have levelled off, community colleges have the opportunity to develop institutional coherence--to develop harmonious interrelationships among the multiple purposes and programs adopted by the college at various times in response to divergent community needs and pressures, and to communicate an understanding of these interrelationships to all concerned parties. One of the major difficulties involved in developing institutional coherence lies in the nature of the prevailing concepts related to the community college. "Transfer education," "terminal education," "general education," "occupational education," "adult education," "developmental education," "community services," and "guidance" are all considered as distinct functions and are too seldom recognized as vague and overlapping terms; as a consequence, those who fail to perceive the interrelatedness of the several functions tend to discount the importance of those activities from which they feel relatively remote and to allow lines of communication to atrophy. An additional source of difficulty lies in the organizational scheme of the college; here, again, the functions are treated as distinct entities with no relationship to each other. Methods of alleviating these problems and of arriving at a strong identity for community colleges are discussed. (Author/DC)

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DEVELOPING COHERENT COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

SOME PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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As the dust settles from the explosive growth of the Sixties community colleges across the nation are catching their breath and turning their attention inward to a greater extent. No longer hustling to keep pace with the sheer bulk of multifarious and pressing demands voiced by a multitudinous and expanding clientele, the colleges are now able to reflect more upon their purposes and to attempt to bring a greater degree of order and unity to their programs. Evidence of this change may be seen in the professional literature in such recent articles as those by Brown[1], Lombardi[2], Zoglin[3], and Gleazer[4]. The purpose of the present article is to provide additional observations upon the community college as a unified, purposeful organization and to focus particularly upon the development of institutional coherence or integration.

Coherence, in this context, may be seen as a question of internal articulation. In practical terms, it is a matter of developing harmonious interrelationships among the numerous purposes and programs adopted by the college at various times in response to divergent community needs and pressures and of communicating an understanding of these interrelationships to all concerned parties. The achievement of institutional coherence is not a simple task.

Conceptual Difficulties

One of the difficulties involved in developing institutional coherence lies in the nature of prevailing concepts related to the community college. For over half a century now spokesmen for the two-year college have been ticking off item by item its growing list of functions. The catechism,

which has been repeated in countless university classrooms, professional conferences, and college faculty meetings, currently runs about as follows: the functions of the community college are transfer education, general education, occupational education, adult education, community services, and perhaps guidance and developmental education. But in their desire to emphasize the multipurpose character of the colleges, these spokesmen have too often left the impression that the list of functions comprises a neat categorical system describing a number of discrete curricular packages and too seldom have indicated the considerable vagueness and overlapping which characterize the list and its curricular embodiment. For this reason it is important now to examine the function concepts more closely and more critically.

First, the concept of transfer education must be regarded today as having limited utility in light of the bewildering variety of directions open to the student upon his departure from the college and in light of his relative uncertainty as to his next steps. If we accept the conventional wisdom that two-thirds of community college students expect to transfer and that one-third actually do, then it is clear that the prediction of transfer must be incorrect about half the time. Some studies, moreover, have shown much higher error rates. Even if the prediction of transfer is correct, however, we are little informed until we know to which program in which institution the student will proceed. Terminal education has generally been considered as the logical complement of transfer education. Although studies of the accuracy of predictions of termination are relatively few, it is clear that a number of students who expect to terminate studies upon leaving the community college actually

go on to senior institutions. Even where the prediction is accurate, though, we know little until we determine how long the student will abstain from further study and to what sort of alternative activity he will proceed. ("Terminal," in its absolute sense, can be applied to a student only in the past tense; furthermore, it can be applied with certainty only on a post mortem basis, since the possibility of returning to formal study persists to some degree throughout life.) In the last analysis the terms "transfer" and "terminal" should probably not be used with individual students at all, and their use with groups of students would seem to offer little benefit. Application of the terms to individual courses and to programs of study should likewise be done only with considerable circumspection[5].

Next, the concept of general education, in its commonplace usage as the complement of specialized education, suffers from serious semantic difficulties. The basic problem is that general education is usually seen as a particular category or type of education, while it more properly should be regarded simply as an entire, balanced, and harmonious education in itself. Examination of the goals of general education promulgated by the President's Commission on Higher Education reveals that all significant areas of human development - including career preparation - are embraced in the concept[6]. The question, then, is what is not general education? Specialized education provides a rather poor answer insofar as it usually indicates the major field of study and the expected career area. The confusion is compounded by recognizing that so-called general education courses make up an important part of career programs, such areas of

human development as communication skills and interpersonal relations skills, for example, being seen as essential to the success of individuals in their careers. Finally, since specialization is a matter of degree, it would be difficult and arbitrary to sort out general from specialized education courses. General education certainly may be laudable as a general commitment of the community college, but the term should not be applied to any particular set or pattern of courses, nor should it be applied to a particular component of any individual student's program of studies. If a student's "general education" has been seen to or achieved, it will be apparent in his total program of studies and not in any particular subset thereof.

Occupational education, as a concept, suffers from overbroadness and considerable overlapping with other function concepts. Thus, the usual distinction drawn between "occupational" and "academic" or "transfer" education is largely artificial and misleading, as Brown[7] and Axelrod and others[8] have emphasized. Academic or transfer students most often have career goals, at least general ones, in mind when selecting their major fields. Indeed, 71 percent of all two-year college students, according to Cross, state career preparation as the most important reason for attending college[9]. Only an ill-defined minority of students, then, do not enroll in some form of occupational education. As to programs of study, it would be hard to determine which ones are taken predominantly for career reasons and which for other reasons. (Not a few "adult" students take "career" courses of various kinds for recreational purposes.) Considering all difficulties, we might well conclude that affixing the

label "occupational" or "career" to any student or program offers little positive value and may well serve more to distort than to clarify matters.

Adult education, continuing education, or lifelong education, as it is variously called, is a concept quite easily disposed of. By the Twenty-Sixth Amendment and related legislation in the several states, persons eighteen years old now hold the voting right and nearly all other rights of majority. Practically all community college students therefore may be considered as "adults" and their education as "adult education." Lest this conclusion seem too facile, we may consider alternative definitions of adult education. None of these, however, whether it be based upon the student's part-time or evening attendance, upon the recreational nature of his courses, upon his holding responsibilities as head of a family, upon his holding a full-time job, or upon his lack of a degree or certificate objective, really escapes the arbitrariness or the artificiality of the previous definition.

The concept of community service is more an all-embracing commitment of the college than a single function separate from the others. The entire productive output of the community college serves the community, and each program or activity within the college should in some sense be a community service. Actually, the term "community service" is usually intended to mean "other community services," and, as such, is a catch-all term designed to cover all college activities not included in the other functional categories. A problem is created, though, by the recent trend to include adult education within community service, for if adult education is a service to the community, how can education of the youth not also be considered such a service? The community service function, then, cannot logically be considered as a function which is coordinate with the others mentioned. It must instead

be regarded as a higher order concept embracing the other functions and generally conveying the idea of community-centeredness or community commitment which has been an increasingly emphasized characteristic of the colleges since around 1950.

Guidance, like community service, is a concept which tends to spread out over the entire range of college functions. Nearly every interaction of the college with the student properly should serve to guide him in some respect. Regular classes certainly should serve to guide him intellectually, just as other college activities might guide him socially, occupationally, or personally. In any case, given the realities of the usual student-counselor ratios, the proportion of students who volunteer for counseling, and the frequent student contact with instructors, it becomes clear that the guidance function cannot be segregated out entirely to the student personnel staff, nor can it be separated in any other way from all college activities which impinge directly, or even indirectly, upon the student. Guidance, then, overlaps all the other other functions of the college; moreover, it permeates them all.

Finally, even the concept of remedial or developmental education is not so clearcut nor so easily isolated as at first glance it might seem, for all education may be considered as developmental in some way and to some degree. Even if the concept is restricted to the development of basic learning skills, its application can hardly be confined to a limited group of students. Cross has noted that 68 percent of the students in one study desired help in developing good study techniques and that 54 percent needed help in reading[10]. Accepting the most restrictive definition, that

is, education designed to bring one or more of a student's basic skills up to the point from which college students "normally" start, does not totally eliminate difficulties. For example, if we should examine the motives of three students engaged in the same developmental English course, we might find one student desiring to prepare for entry into a regular, freshman English transfer course, another desiring to meet the regular communications requirement for an "occupational" program, and the third simply wanting to improve his skills with no further purpose definitely in mind. By the strictest definition only the first student is engaged in "remedial" education, though all three may be doing about the same thing in the same place. It is possible, then, to label a course "remedial" or "developmental" if it treats a basic skills subject at a level lower than that typically found in a college freshman course, but the label has little meaning or utility except in relation to college parallel programs and students involved in them.

The conceptual problems which have been outlined above are important in that they adversely affect the behavior of college staff members and students. Persons who fail to perceive the interrelatedness of the several functional aspects of the college tend to discount the importance of those activities from which they feel relatively remote and to allow lines of communication to atrophy. As a consequence, any campuswide feeling of community is diminished.

Serious as they are, however, conceptual problems can be alleviated by carefully planned efforts on the part of campus leaders. Educational (or re-educational) activities can be incorporated into staff development

programs so as to break down conceptual barriers and to emphasize the complex interdependencies among the functional components of the college. Rather than concentrating exclusively upon their own particular areas of involvement, faculty may be encouraged to recognize the college's common commitment to serve the community by assisting in the development of its human resources. The task cannot be accomplished in a single orientation session, however. It must be carried forward over a substantial period of time, with reinforcement at reasonable intervals.

Problems of Organization, Departmentalization, and Growth

An additional source of difficulty in the development of institutional coherence lies in the organizational scheme of the college. Growing out of prevailing concepts regarding purpose and functions and fed by exposure to university models, the formal structure of the community college most often codifies and perpetuates the conceptual weaknesses described above. A mere glance at most organizational charts is sufficient to reveal the all-too-familiar set of functions as they stand neatly separated by bureaucratic walls. To the extent that the college organization influences or reflects campus behavior we should expect in these circumstances to find little in common to link the variety of campus activities. To combat such entrenchment of organizational boundaries, a number of colleges have developed organizational tables built along different lines and based upon ideas of integrating college functions. For example, a number of colleges (including Tulsa Junior College and South Oklahoma City Junior College) are so organized as to bring together both "occupational" and "academic" programs into the same instructional units.

More challenging than the problems of formal organization are those arising from natural human predispositions in the matters of communication and social grouping, particularly as they are heightened by exposure to university models and to ideas of professionalism. Lombardi describes the apparently irresistible tendency of faculties to cluster around disciplines (to "departmentalize") and he points to the very meager success of administrators in preventing or mollifying such clannishness [11]. The problem is complicated somewhat by the contradictory nature of its effects. While on the one hand, close interpersonal relationships within the department or program may serve to improve the quality of individual programs, on the other, they may promote the "we-they" thinking previously mentioned, thus impeding cooperation and communication across programs or departments. Grouping faculty from different departments together physically may or may not be helpful. Under such conditions one could expect disciplinary ties to connect faculty with their departmental fellows, wherever located, and physical proximity to help them in relations with disciplinary "aliens." Scientific evidence of the efficacy of such arrangements in the community college context seems to be lacking. It may well be that more traditional arrangements are actually better at those colleges where committee assignments and campus-wide coffee hours serve to nurture relationships across departmental boundaries.

Yet another factor militating against the development of institutional coherence has been the rapid expansion of the community college and the concomitant influx of new staff members. Although graduate programs and courses aimed at the community college have also grown rapidly, the fact

remains that most new staff members are in need of orientation both to the community college in general and to their own institution in particular. Since new faculty apparently receive the bulk of their orientation from colleagues within their department,[12] one may expect any departmental tendencies toward chauvinism, clannishness, or isolationism to be transmitted to the newcomer. To deal with the orientation of staff, both new and old, colleges have increasingly been implementing carefully planned staff development programs. To the extent that such programs explain how the various college functions interrelate and cooperatively support overall institutional goals, they should help to minimize the negative influence of staff growth upon institutional coherence.

The Problem of Identity

The identity of the junior college has been a matter of concern since its earliest days. Indeed, as one considers the primal examples of the institution he may conclude that they began to exist as junior colleges only as they became aware of their unique "identity." Evidence of the historic importance lent to the development of this collective identity is seen in the first constitution of the American Association of Junior Colleges, which states as one of the dual purposes of the organization "to define the junior college."[13] Brick has traced the continuation of this concern,[14] and more recent writers have indicated that the question is still a vital one[15]. As recently as late in 1974 Gleazer again focussed attention upon identity as he continued in his analysis of the "state of the profession" of community college education[16].

But what has identity to do with coherence? The two traits are closely related and interdependent. The development of identity depends upon the influence of integrative factors within the college. To use Selznick's words, institutional character is an "integrated product."[17] On the other hand, a strong sense of identity serves as a beacon to guide the development and harmonizing of multiple subordinate units within the institution. It assists college officials in determining which of a number of proposed activities or programs would be most appropriate for the college's adoption and which would be least appropriate. It serves as a common base for communication among staff members and between the college and community. In the last analysis, the existence of a well developed sense of identity on campus is highly persuasive, if not conclusive, evidence of the existence of a high degree of internal coherence.

To further understand the relevance of institutional identity to the problem of coherence it is necessary to examine closer the concept of institutional character. (For present purposes "identity" and "character" will be considered synonymous and the terms will be used interchangeably.) Selznick discusses institutional character within the framework of a psychological analogy to individual human character and he identifies four significant attributes: institutional character is a <u>historical</u> product, it is <u>integrated</u>, it is <u>functional</u>, and it is <u>dynamic</u>. It is historical in that it "reflects the specific experiences of the particular organization;" it is integrated in that it conforms to some "discoverable pattern" or "character-structure;" it is functional in that it "aids the organization to adapt itself to its internal and external environment;" and it is dynamic in that it "generates new and active forces." The character of an organiza-

tion is set by the process of accepting "irreversible commitments"--ways of acting and responding which can be changed only with great difficulty, if at all, and which embody the basic values of the organization[18].

Applying the concept of institutional character to colleges, Clark identifies several significant components and classifies them under headings of institution, faculty, and students. Institutional components include the curriculum, the college's traditional self-image, the authority structure, and the social base. Faculty values, authority, and conceptions of the institution fall under the second heading, and student input qualities, roles, and subcultures fit under the third. This list, Clark cautions, is not definitive; certain of these features may not be important at certain colleges. The list does, however, provide sensitizing ideas for the examination of college character[19].

With the foregoing description of the nature and components of institutional identity in mind it is now possible to turn to the problem of identity in the community colleges, for which institutions the problem takes on particularly crucial significance. Collectively the colleges represent an institutional species which has evolved from the transfer-oriented "junior college" to the "community college" to the "comprehensive community college" to the "open door college" to the present day institution for "community-based, performance-oriented postsecondary education" within the span of little more than half a century. During this time the colleges have entertained debate over whether they are secondary or higher education, what degrees or certificates (if any) they should award, whether they should extend over two or four years, and whether they should orient

themselves toward the senior institutions, the occupations, or the broader community. The ever-broadening service adaptation to the environment and the continuing ambiguities of organizational status should, according to Clark, work to the detriment of institutional integrity[20]. Cohen and Brawer echo this concern. They point to internal contradictions among the multiple college roles and suggest that the more responsibilities the colleges take on, the less successful they are likely to be in meeting any of them[21].

Another question raised by the last two writers refers to the degree of uniformity among community colleges. Should the colleges be "massive, bland carbon copies" or should they be "small, unique institutions?"[22] The question is tantamount to asking whether the colleges should be more influenced by a professionally established, general model or by the unique parameters of their particular communities. The answer which seems most appropriate is that the duality may not be genuine nor the choice necessarily forced. So long as the model emphasizes responsiveness to the community a given college may conform to the model and to community parameters, as well. True, a review of the contemporary scene will reveal a number of massive, bland institutions, but it is also true that these institutions may be found in massive, bland communities. These remarks do not totally dispel fears of excessive uniformity, however, for influence beyond the scope of the community may indeed tend to force the institutions into a mold. At present the expanding powers of state-level controlling or coordinating agencies seem to present the greatest threat to the institutional uniqueness of the colleges.

Specific solutions to the identity problem at the individual college

level are not readily apparent. A general formula for clarifying and strengthening identity might involve several of the following actions, however.

Determination of the present character of the college.-As a point of departure it is necessary to assess the present character of the college, though this may be somewhat diffuse or uncertain. Clark suggests a historical approach: looking back to the last "character-defining era" of the institution -- the most recent period of major change -- and identifying the ideals and new practices of that critical time. Identification of the "carrying mechanisms" is also important. Such forces as senior faculty, public reputation, and often certain well-entrenched structures or practices tend to preserve the college character unchanged over substantial periods of time[23].

Identification and assessment of pressures for change.--Arrayed against the forces of conservatism mentioned above are numerous forces directed toward changing the character of the college in various ways. New state legislation and regulations, changing student characteristics, competing institutions, new staff members with differing orientations, new federal regulations and funding priorities, and changing social and economic conditions surrounding the college all may exert pressure upon the college to move away from its traditional identity. It is necessary to identify these forces and to assess their potency and direction in order to determine their implications for the institution's identity.

Determination of needed modifications.--After considering the historic character of the institution, the forces acting to preserve that character,

and pressures promoting change, a determination must be made as to what modifications, if any, are necessary and feasible. Analysis of the relative strengths of the conflicting forces and consideration of possible interactions and new combinations which might arise is the first step. In this connection Clark suggests examining the means by which the institution traditionally has dealt with such pressures for change as a means of gaining insight as to which pressures the institution can cope with and remain relatively unchanged and which pressures cannot be resisted [24]. The resolution finally arrived at must reflect a realistic balance between the conservative and the innovative forces. It should generally entail the least possible adjustment of those basic and long-standing value commitments of the institution.

Re-orientation of staff and community; adjustment of activities. When needed modifications in the character of the institution have been determined it is then essential to discuss them and the reasons behind them with the college staff, students, and the surrounding community. Likewise, the activities of the college must be examined in light of these modifications and brought into accord with them.

Summary and Conclusion

Now that the period of explosive growth for the community colleges has ended it is possible for these institutions to begin to look inward more and to deal with a number of basic questions and problems which have long been associated with them. The overriding problem of bringing unity and clarity of purpose to a complex institution made up a vaguely defined, overlapping, and even contradictory functions may be partially solved by

abandoning misleading and inadequate conceptualizations and replacing them with a broader, unified conception of the college mission. The problem of internal organization may be dealt with by careful scrutiny of existing alternative models and by experimentation followed by thorough evaluation. Staff orientation can be better achieved by creating programs with more seriousness of purpose, more carefully thought out objectives and activities, and more attention to interrelationships among the programs and their cooperative support of college goals. Development of a firm identity--an unambiguous "self" against which contemplated programs, actions, and policies may be tested for consistency--is a very complex matter, which can be resolved only by application of considerable effort over a lengthy period of time. Steps to be employed in building identity might include reviewing the college history, assessing pressures for change, determining a new identity status which balances forces for stability against those for change, obtaining acceptance of the new identity status, and bringing college activities into accord with it.

In summary, the coherent community college is a possibility--a possibility which depends for its realization upon the solution of a number of problems, among which those mentioned here seem to be particularly prominent. The prospects for success cannot be evaluated with any accuracy at this time; however, the examples seen in several institutions today present favorable omens and we may hope that they presage a bright day ahead for the community colleges.

[1]Richard J. Brown, "The Walls Must Tumble Down: Another View of Comprehensiveness," Community College Review, 2:1 (Spring, 1974), pp. 6-9.

[2]John Lombardi, "The Community College Departmental Structure - Directions for the Future," Community College Review, 2:2 (Summer, 1974), pp. 33-40.

[3]Mary Lou Zoglin, "The Community Stake in the Community College," Community and Junior College Journal, 45:1 (August-September, 1974), pp. 19-22.

[4]Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., "Beyond the Open Door: The Open College," Community and Junior College Journal, 45:1 (August-September, 1974), pp. 6-12.

[5]Note the similar suggestion of Dorothy M. Knoell and Leland L. Medsker in From Junior to Senior College: A National Study of the Transfer Student (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1965), p. 89.

[6]Higher Education for American Democracy. A Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), Volume I.

[7]Brown, p. 7.

[8]Joseph Axelrod, Mervin B. Freedman, Winslow R. Hatch, Joseph Katz, and Nevitt Sanford, Search for Relevance: The Campus in Crisis (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969), p. 65.

[9]K. Patricia Cross, The Junior College Student: A Research Description (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Services, 1968), pp. 35-36.

[10]Ibid., p. 45.

[11]Lombardi, pp. 36-37.

[12]Ibid, p. 34.

[13]Constitution and By-Laws of the American Association of Junior Colleges, published in Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Bulletin, 1922, No. 19 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 71.

[14]Michael Brick, Forum and Focus for the Junior College Movement (New York: Teachers College Press, 1963), pp. 71-87.

[15]Two prominent examples are Leland L. Medsker and Dale Tillery, Breaking the Access Barriers (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp. 146-147, and Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer, "The Community College in Search of Identity," Change, 3:8 (Winter 1971-1972), pp. 55-59.

[16]Gleazer.

[17]Philip Selznick, Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 38.

[18]Ibid., pp. 38-40.

[19]Burton R. Clark, "The Character of Colleges: Some Case Studies," in R.J. Ingham (ed.), Institutional Backgrounds of Adult Education: Dynamics of Change in the Modern University. (Boston: The Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1966), pp. 29-35.

[20]Burton R. Clark, Adult Education in Transition: A Study of Institutional Insecurity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), pp. 156, 158.

[21]Cohen and Brawer, p. 57.

[22]Ibid., p. 58.

[23]Clark, "The Character of Colleges," pp. 35-37.

[24]Ibid., pp.37-38.

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